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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0420
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
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RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3493
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1311
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1178
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1747
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2310
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000331

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: COOPERATION WITH INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND HUMAN RIGHTS MOVES FORWARD

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0206

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0099

[1](#)C. 07 ASHGABAT 1130

[1](#)D. 07 ASHGABAT 1346

[1](#)E. 07 ASHGABAT 1391

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (U) SUMMARY: Over the past two weeks, USAID Country Representative has met with the Director of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights to finalize areas of cooperation that were discussed in previous meetings. USAID noted the progress made and introduced implementing partner ABA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as a joint partner in preparing a legal database. Although the Director was pleased with the new ideas, she made it clear that she was ready to see USAID action on the ideas as well. The Director noted that the Institute was ready to start the process of bringing Turkmenistan's Law on Religion into conformity with international standards as well as begin to review juvenile, family, and election laws. END SUMMARY.

FEBRUARY 26 MEETING: GETTING GOING

[1](#)3. (U) USAID/CAR Regional Director Bill Frej and Program Officer John Morgan, along with the USAID Country Representative, met with the Director of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights Shirin Ahmedova and Department Head Shemshat Atajanova on February 26. Although it was an introductory meeting for the regional USAID representatives, Ahmedova took the opportunity to follow up on issues discussed in recent meetings and to begin planning future joint activities. Ahmedova thanked USAID for helping coordinate the recent meetings with USAID's regional local governance expert and USAID's sub-grantee to Counterpart's Turkmenistan Community Empowerment Program (TCEP), the American Bar Association (ABA). She appreciated their suggestions and was ready to move forward with planning for local governance and service delivery as well as rule of law programs.

[1](#)4. (U) Ahmedova noted that the Institute was ready to start the

process of bringing Turkmenistan's Law on Religion into conformity with international standards. Moreover, it had established a commission in November 2007 to improve all legislation to international standards. Turkmenistan established an interagency process for reviewing laws and has already drafted a list of laws that will be reviewed. In addition to the Law on Religion, it will also include juvenile, family, and election laws. The Institute will also partner with international organizations and/or donors to coordinate assistance in reviewing and drafting the new legislation.

¶15. (U) Ahmedova also proposed a meeting later the same week to firm up plans for USAID-supported computer training for Institute staff and assistance with developing a legal database. She requested USAID assistance to create a legal database that would not only include Turkmenistan's legislation but CIS legislation as well (septel). (NOTE: The expanded focus goes beyond what USAID had originally proposed, and closely corresponds to an existing online OSCE resource, www.legislationonline.org. END NOTE.) Ahmedova noted that Turkmenistan was improving its laws by bringing them into conformity with international standards, and would begin by looking to its neighboring countries for successful examples.

MARCH 1 MEETING: FOCUS ON RESULTS

¶16. (U) Ahmedova and Institute Department Head Shemshat Atajanova met early on Saturday morning with USAID Country Representative, the visiting USAID/CAR Deputy Regional Director of Democracy and Conflict Mitigation, and USAID's implementing partner IREX to organize logistics for proposed computer training. Rather than simply talk about possible training courses, Ahmedova moved ahead to set specific dates for the training courses to begin. She also gave IREX's representative Atajanova's personal phone number and told

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them to contact her and continue with the necessary planning.

¶17. (U) USAID Country Representative informed Ahmedova that progress had been made on the previous plans for the legal database. After meeting the day before with OSCE, the two donors proposed to partner with the Institute on this project since by working together they could deliver a better product in less time. The OSCE would provide the physical components (such as database software, scanning of laws, and loading onto the internet) necessary for putting the database together and USAID, through Counterpart and ABA would provide technical assistance on using the database. While it was possible for Counterpart/ABA and/or IREX to compile a legal database for the Institute, the OSCE has already created a single site for other CIS countries, and it would be easy for them to do the same for Turkmenistan.

¶18. (U) Ahmedova was very interested to begin working on the database and seemed more concerned with getting a product up and running rather than a complete version that had all of the laws and other legislative acts. (COMMENT: This makes sense, since it will be almost impossible to get all laws and legislation together before posting it online. END COMMENT.) She also knows that there are other ministries planning on putting together a legal database as well. Based on discussions with other international organizations, various ministries appear to be competing to be the first one to complete the task (septel). Despite a very busy schedule to prepare for International Women's Day on March 8, she asked for another meeting two days later to talk about the next steps in getting the database up and running. She asked that OSCE and USAID be present to coordinate and state their plans.

MARCH 3 MEETING: STRICTLY BUSINESS

¶19. (U) USAID learned before the meeting that the OSCE Ambassador would represent OSCE, along with the OSCE Center's Human Dimensions Officer. The OSCE Ambassador was very concerned about the Center's project list for 2008, approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which stated that the OSCE would partner with the Ministry of Justice for a similar database project. (NOTE: The OSCE project was approved by MFA for the first time this year after being rejected for the past three years. END NOTE.) He was also concerned that

the approved project list limited the ability of the Institute to work with OSCE on a data base project since it was not listed as the partner.

¶10. (U) Ahmedova read the relevant clause in the agreement and said that the agreement does not preclude cooperative work. She noted that the Ministry of Justice and Institute of Democracy are already partners on informational matters and that it should not matter if the OSCE worked with the Institute on this project. Moreover, she stated the Institute could employ the Ministry of Justice as a partner without a specific Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Ahmedova said that she would call the Minister of Foreign Affairs to ask the MFA to remove the offending clause from its agreement with the OSCE so that the proposed partnership could continue. She also requested that the OSCE Ambassador contact the MFA to have the clause removed. The OSCE Ambassador was surprised by her suggestions and perhaps by the speed of her reaction as well.

¶11. (U) The ABA Country Director made a brief presentation on the types of training that ABA could provide both for the database and otherwise. He pointed out that the database would be obsolete the day it came online if it were not routinely updated with Turkmenistan laws, regulations, and Presidential Decrees in a timely manner. He also stressed the need to establish a central repository, to which Ahmedova agreed. Ahmedova was pleased with information and pressed for a workplan with goals and dates be submitted as soon as possible. Ahmedova concluded by giving him Atajanova's personal phone number, and noted that he should keep Atajanova informed as ABA continued to work in this direction.

¶12. (U) On the way out of the meeting, the OSCE Ambassador told the

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USAID Regional Deputy Director of Democracy and Conflict Mitigation that he was extremely pleased with the output of the meeting and that he was happy that the two entities could partner together. All agreed that the meeting was extremely productive. USAID Country Representative asked ABA Director to develop a workplan for the Institute, since Ahmedova was ready to move beyond meetings to actions. USAID Country Representative further noted that the workplan should contain immediate deliverables, such as legal training experts, which would illustrate the U.S. side's commitment to working with the Institute. ABA agreed to submit a plan within several days.

¶13. (U) COMMENT: This series of meetings was extremely productive and continued the growing working-level engagement with the Institute. The meetings also showed that the Institute is not just interested in talking about action, rather its director is extremely interested in seeing it as well. Ahmedova ended each meeting with a clear indication of the next steps that she expected. It is now extremely important that the United States delivers on these meetings. This will not only continue to earn her trust, but will also show the resources which our partners can bring, and will hopefully open up further areas for joint work with the Institute. The partnership with the OSCE on the legal database project is also important since, despite much talk on donor coordination, it is a rare occurrence in practice. END COMMENT.

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